

## Father Matters

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This document summarizes the most recent data about the significance and experience of fathers. The intent is to provide a rationale for the importance of a proposed Extension initiative “Father Matters” in Kansas.

The data provided here is drawn from a variety of resources, especially reports at *The National Center on Fathering* ([www.fathers.com](http://www.fathers.com)) and *The Center for Successful Fathering* ([www.fathering.org](http://www.fathering.org)). For further information and more detail, please visit these great sites.

The findings are organized by the following themes and conclusions:

### *Fathers are significant*

- Fathers are an important audience to reach
- Fathers can have a critical role as parents
- Expectations of fathers are increasing
- The younger generation of men is more committed to fathering

### *Fatherhood under stress*

- Father absence is a critical problem
- Out-of-wedlock births separate children from fathers
- Many fathers raise their children alone
- Coordinating work and family time is difficult
- More families are relying on dad for childcare while mom works
- The number of unmarried live-in dads has increased

### *Consequences of fatherlessness*

- Poverty
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Physical and emotional health problems
- Poor educational performance
- Crime
- Harmful teen sexual activity and pregnancy
- Child abuse

## Fathers are significant

### *Fathers are an important audience to reach*

Total fathers with their own children under 18 (based on U.S. Census data & projections):  
64,300,000.

There are 26,500,000 married dads with children under 18.

### *Fathers can have a critical role as parents*

A 2002 Economic & Social Research Council report titled “Involved Fathers Key for Children,” based on 17,000 children born in the United Kingdom in 1958 and who were followed up with at ages 7, 11, 16, 23 and 33 found that

- Children with involved fathers have less emotional and behavioral difficulties in adolescence

- Teenagers who feel close to their fathers in adolescence go on to have more satisfactory adult marital relationships
- Girls who have a strong relationship with their fathers during adolescence showed a lack of psychological distress in adult life

A chapter report in *The Role of the Father in Child Development* (1981) described research that found that, when left with a stranger, children whose fathers were highly involved were less likely to cry, worry, or disrupt play than other one-year olds whose fathers were less involved.

A National Center for Education survey of over 20,000 parents reported in 1997 found that when fathers are involved in their children's education including attending school meetings and volunteering at school, children were more likely to get A's, enjoy school, and participate in extracurricular activities and less likely to have repeated a grade.

Using nationally representative data on over 2,600 adults born in the inner city, researchers reported in the 1997 journal *Pediatrics* that children who lived with both parents were more likely to have finished high school, be economically self-sufficient, and to have a healthier life style than their peers who grew up in a broken home.

Researchers reported in a 1990 issue of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* that in a 26-year longitudinal study on 379 individuals the single most important childhood factor in developing empathy is paternal involvement. Fathers who spent time alone with their kids performing routine childcare at least two times a week, raised children who were the most compassionate adults.

### ***Expectations of fathers are increasing***

The National Center for Fathering's Gallup Poll in 1992 found 96.8% of those responding agreed that fathers should be more involved their children's education. 54.1% agreed with the statement, "Fathers today spend less time with their children than their fathers did with them."

Employees link family satisfaction with productivity at work, and many companies are starting to recognize this. At DuPont Corp, a 1995 study concluded "The most striking finding ... is the positive impact that DuPont's work-life programs have had on business results." In their study of 18,000 employees, the company found that the top three reasons employees rejected changes in their duties or promotions were family related. They had refused: relocation (34%) increased travel (24%), and overtime or a job with more pressure (21%).

### ***The younger generation of men is more committed to fathering***

According to an advertising agency's annual "Lifestyle Survey," young and older men responded similarly to the question "When making important family decisions, consideration of the children should come first" in 1986 (about two thirds agreed). In 1995 there was a great difference (81% of young men under 25 agreed while 66% of men older than 25 agreed)

Estimates peg the number of dads who are present at their children's births as rising from 27% in 1974 to over 90% today.

The growth of flextime is benefiting fathers. Almost half of fathers working at two federal agencies chose the option to come to work earlier so they could leave earlier to spend more time with their families.

A 1987 Fortune magazine poll found 30% of fathers said they had personally turned down a job promotion or transfer because it would have reduced the time they spend with their families.

If given the choice, 38% of working dads say they would take a pay cut to spend more time with their kids. (2007 survey by CareerBuilder.com)

## Fatherhood under stress

### *Father absence is a critical problem*

Children who were part of the "post war generation" could expect to grow up with two biological parents who were married to each other. Eighty percent did. According to David Poponoe ("American Family Decline, 1960-1990: A Review and Appraisal" *Journal of Marriage and Family* 55, August 1993) only about 50% of children will spend their entire childhood in an intact family today.

According to the 2004 U.S. Census Bureau an estimated 23.6 million children (32.3 percent) live absent from their biological father.

According to a 1997 Gallup Youth Survey, 33 % of teens live away from their father. That percentage increases to 43% for urban teens.

While joint custody and other arrangements are increasing fathers' involvement after divorce, the effects are still devastating on children. The National Commission on Children's national survey of children and parents (1991) found close to half of children in disrupted families hadn't seen their fathers at all in the past year. Nearly one in five children in female-headed families hadn't seen their fathers in five years. Frank Furstenberg (*Divided Families*, 1991) said more than one-half of all children who don't live with their father have never been in their father's home.

Another cause of physical absence is incarceration. According to Bureau of Justice Statistics, as of June 1994 there were an estimated 778,761 dads behind bars with children under 18, and an additional 105,500 dads whose only children were over 18.

According to Ron Klinger in his article "Father Involvement Reduces School Violence published by the *Center for Successful Fathering* ([www.fathering.org](http://www.fathering.org)), the evidence indicates those male students without involved fathers:

- Represent 75% of all adolescents and teenagers seen by the Justices of the Peace
- Are more than twice as likely to fail course work and repeat a grade
- Are more than six to eleven times more likely to be suspended for violent behavior
- Represent three of four deaths by suicide
- Are anxious, hostile, and more likely to be rejected by peers
- Represent 80% of males treated in psychiatric hospitals

Dr Klinger goes on to say, "There is an avalanche of data, which clearly links the absence of active fathers to the students most often involved in drug abuse, gang-related activities and violent behavior in schools. And yet, the consequences of nearly four decades of father absence have gone beyond the obvious. "

In an unpublished paper, Henry B. Biller noted that even in intact families, the amount of time children have with their fathers is limited. In two-parent households, fewer than 25% of young boys and girls experience an average of at least one hour a day of relatively individualized contact with their fathers. The average daily amount of one-to-one father/child contact reported in this country is less than 30 minutes.

In a *Center for Successful Fathering* paper, Ron Klinger reported a research study involving a nationally representative study of children 11-16 years of age who lived in mother-headed household in 1988 that almost half had not seen their father in "the last twelve months."

### *Out-of-wedlock births separate children from fathers*

In 1996 "Facts at a Glance" Child Trends noted that 1/3 of all newborns were born out-of-wedlock in 1994. Of those births, one third were to teenagers, and another third were to women aged 20 to 24.

According to the 1997 report by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, the number of live births to unmarried women went from 224,300 in 1960 to 1,248,000 in 1995.

According to a 1997 population survey by the GPO, the number of children living with never married mothers has grown from 221,000 in 1960 to 5,862,000 in 1995.

### ***Many fathers raise their children alone***

In 2.2 million households, fathers raise their children without a mother.

Among single parents living with their children, close to one in six is a father, compared with one in 10 in 1970. The number of single-father households rose 62 percent in the past 10 years.

### ***Coordinating work and family time is difficult***

According to a 2007 survey by CareerBuilder.com:

- Forty-eight percent of working fathers have missed a significant event in their child's life due to work at least once in the last year and nearly one in five (18 percent) have missed four or more
- More than one in four (27 percent) working dads say they spend more than 50 hours a week on work and nearly one in 10 (8 percent) spend more than 60 hours
- One in four (25 percent) working dads spend less than one hour with their kids each day. Forty-two percent spend less than two hours each day
- Thirty-six percent of working dads say their company does not offer flexible work arrangements such as flexible schedules, telecommuting, job sharing and more
- One in twelve men will be a dad while serving in the military, with the demands that lifestyle can bring

### ***More families are relying on dad for childcare while mom works***

According to the 1991 Census Bureau report, "Who's Minding the Kids?"

- Primary care for children under 5 whose mother works was supplied 20% of the time by dads (up from 14% of fathers in 1977), and for households where children were 5 to 14, 6.6% of the time. The total number of dads involved in primary childcare while mom works: 3,385,000
- While 13,880,000 couples with children less than 18 both work for pay, only 5,014,000 both work full-time day-shift jobs

### ***The number of unmarried live-in dads has increased***

According to the 1994 *Statistical Abstract* (p. 56) for the Census Bureau there were 1,270,000 fathers living as an unmarried couple with children under 15 years old.

## **Consequences of fatherlessness**

### ***Poverty***

In a 2002 Census Bureau report, children in father-absent homes are five times more likely to be poor. In 2002, 7.8% of children in married-couple families were living in poverty, compared to 38.4% of children in female-householder families.

In 1996, the *National Center for Children in Poverty* noted that young children living with unmarried mothers were five times as likely to be poor and ten times as likely to be extremely poor.

In 1993 the *National Commission on Children* concluded that almost 75% of American children living in single-parent families would experience poverty before they turn 11 years old. Only 20 percent of children in two-parent families will do the same.

### ***Drug and alcohol abuse***

In 1993, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services stated, "Fatherless children are at a dramatically greater risk of drug and alcohol abuse."

Researchers at Columbia University (reported in a 1999 issue of *Alcoholism & Drug Abuse Weekly*) found that children living in two-parent household with a poor relationship with their father are 68% more likely to smoke, drink, or use drugs compared to all teens in two-parent households. Teens in single mother households are at a 30% higher risk than those in two-parent households.

In a 2004 study of 6,500 children from the ADDHEALTH database of the *National Fatherhood Initiative*, father closeness was negatively correlated with the number of a child's friends who smoke, drink, and smoke marijuana. Closeness was also correlated with a child's use of alcohol, cigarettes, and hard drugs and was connected to family structure. Intact families ranked higher on father closeness than single-parent families.

In a study reported in a 200 issue of *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors* of the 228 students studied, those from single-parent families reported higher rates of drinking and smoking as well as higher scores on delinquency and aggression tests when compared to boys from two-parent households.

A literature review reported in the 1994 journal *Adolescence* found that children growing up in single-parent households are at a significantly increased risk for drug abuse as teenagers.

A 1994 study reported in *The International Journal of the Addictions* found that children who live apart from their fathers are 4.3 times more likely to smoke cigarettes as teenagers than children growing up with their fathers in the home.

### ***Physical and emotional health problems***

In 1995 report to Congress on out-of-wedlock childbearing, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services revealed that unmarried mothers are less likely to obtain prenatal care and more likely to have a low birth weight baby. Researchers find that these negative effects persist even when they take into account factors, such as parental education, that often distinguish single-parent from two-parent families.

According to National Vital Statistics Reports in 2000, infant mortality rates are 1.8 times higher for infants of unmarried mothers than for married mothers.

A study on nearly 6,000 children reported in 1993 Summer issue of the *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* found that children from single parent homes had more physical and mental health problems than children who lived with two married parents. Additionally, boys in single parent homes were found to have more illnesses than girls in single parent homes.

Based on birth and death data for 217,798 children born in Georgia in 1989 and 1990, infants without a father's name on their birth certificate (17.9 percent of the total) were 2.3 times more likely to die in the first year of life compared to infants with a father's name on their birth certificate.

In a 1988 National Health Interview Survey, children in single-parent families are two to three times as likely as children in two-parent families to have emotional and behavioral problems.

A study of 2,921 mothers reported in a 2003 issue of the journal *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* revealed that single mothers were twice as likely as married mothers to experience a bout of depression in the prior year. Single mothers also reported higher levels of stress, fewer

contacts with family and friends, less involvement with church or social groups and less overall social support.

In a longitudinal study of more than 10,000 families reported in a 2009 issue of *Pediatrics*, researchers found that toddlers living in stepfamilies and single-parent families were more likely to suffer a burn, have a bad fall, or be scarred from an accident compared to kids living with both of their biological parents.

In a study reported in a 2005 issue of the *Journal of American Academic Child Adolescent Psychiatry* 3,400 middle schoolers indicated that not living with both biological parents quadruples the risk of having an affective disorder.

In a 2005 Working Paper for the *Center for Research on Child Well-being* children who live apart from their fathers are more likely to be diagnosed with asthma and experience an asthma-related emergency even after taking into account demographic and socioeconomic conditions. Unmarried, cohabiting parents and unmarried parents living apart are 1.76 and 2.61 times, respectively, more likely to have their child diagnosed with asthma. Marital disruption after birth is associated with a 6-fold increase in the likelihood a children will require an emergency room visit and 5-fold increase of an asthma-related emergency.

A 1993 report in *The Christian Century* stated that three out of four teenage suicides occur in households where a parent has been absent.

### **Poor educational performance**

In studies involving over 25,000 children using nationally representative data sets, children who lived with only one parent had lower grade point averages, lower college aspirations, poor attendance records, and higher drop out rates than students who lived with both parents.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in 1993, fatherless children are twice as likely to drop out of school.

After taking into account race, socioeconomic status, sex, age, and ability, high school students from single-parent households were 1.7 times more likely to drop out than were their corresponding counterparts living with both biological parents.

School children from divorced families are absent more, and more anxious, hostile, and withdrawn, and are less popular with their peers than those from intact families.

According to the 2001 *National Center for Education Statistics*, students in single-parent families or stepfamilies are significantly less likely than students living in intact families to have parents involved in their schools. About half of students living in single-parent families or stepfamilies have parents who are highly involved, while 62 percent of students living with both their parents have parents who are highly involved in their schools.

### **Crime**

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in 1998, children in single parent families are more likely to be in trouble with the law than their peers who grow up with two parents.

A 2004 Department of Justice survey of 7,000 inmates revealed that 39% of jail inmates lived in mother-only households. Approximately forty-six percent of jail inmates in 2002 had a previously incarcerated family member. One-fifth experienced a father in prison or jail.

A study of 13,986 women in prison by the Bureau of Justice Statistics showed that more than half grew up without their father. Forty-two percent grew up in a single-mother household and sixteen percent lived with neither parent.

A national probability sample of 1,636 young men and women published in the 1996 *Social Psychology Quarterly* found that older boys and girls from female headed households are more likely to commit criminal acts than their peers who lived with two parents.

A Center for Successful Fathering report on the impact of absent fathers reveals that the chances that a young male will get involved in criminal behavior triples if he is raised without a father. Seventy percent of youth in state reform institutions grew up in single- or no-parent situations. Two researchers reanalyzed data of delinquency in the 1950s involving 500 delinquents and concluded that the absence of fathers was more the cause of the delinquency than poverty. In addition, 72 percent of murderers and 60 percent of rapists grew up without fathers.

Using statewide data a study in the state of Washington reported in 1997 researchers reported in the journal *Pediatrics* an increased likelihood that children born out-of-wedlock would become a juvenile offender. Compared to their peers born to married parents, children born out-of-wedlock were:

- 1.7 times more likely to become an offender and 2.1 times more likely to become a chronic offender if male
- 1.8 times more likely to become an offender and 2.8 times more likely to become a chronic offender if female
- 10 times more likely to become a chronic juvenile offender if male and born to an unmarried teen mother

In a study of INTERPOL crime statistics of 39 countries reported in a 2004 issue of *Cross-Cultural Research*, researchers found that single parenthood ratios were strongly correlated with violent crimes. This was not true 18 years ago.

### ***Harmful teen sexual activity and pregnancy***

A 1994 report published in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* found that adolescent females between the ages of 15 and 19 years reared in homes without fathers are significantly more likely to engage in premarital sex than adolescent females reared in homes with both a mother and a father.

In a study reported in a 2003 issue of *Evolution and Human Behavior* women whose parents separated between birth and six years old experienced twice the risk of early menstruation, more than four times the risk of early sexual intercourse, and two and a half times higher risk of early pregnancy when compared to women in intact families. The longer a woman lived with both parents, the lower her risk of early reproductive development. Women who experienced three or more changes in her family environment exhibited similar risks but were five times more likely to have an early pregnancy.

A survey of 720 teenage girls by *Parade* in 1997 found that

- 97% of the girls said that having parents they could talk to could help reduce teen pregnancy
- 93% said having loving parents reduced the risk
- 76% said that their fathers were very or somewhat influential on their decision to have sex

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in 1988, children in single parent families are more likely to get pregnant as teenagers than their peers who grow up with two parents.

A survey "Facing the Challenges of Fragmented Families" published by the *Philanthropy Roundtable* in 1995 found that a white teenage girl from an advantaged background is five times more likely to become a teen mother if she grows up in a single-mother household than if she grows up in a household with both biological parents.

### ***Child abuse***

In the 1997 *Key National Indicators of Well-Being* living in a single-parent home doubles the risk that a child will suffer physical, emotional, or educational neglect compared to living with both parents.

In the 1997 *Key National Indicators of Well-Being* the overall rate of child abuse and neglect in single-parent households is 27.3 children per 1,000, whereas the rate of overall maltreatment in two-parent households is 15.5 per 1,000.

An analysis of child abuse cases in 1996 by the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect in a nationally representative sample of 42 counties found that children from single-parent families are more likely to be victims of physical and sexual abuse than children who live with both biological parents. Compared to their peers living with both parents, children in single parent homes had more than a 70% greater risk of being physically abused or neglected.